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Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Croatian Army launches major offensive against Krajina Serbs; shells UNCRO posts, killing Danish soldier; Secretary-General urges parties to stop fighting and resume negotiations.

* Special Representative voices concern for civilians and peace-keepers in Croatia; United Nations to continue to implement mandate and provide humanitarian assistance where possible.

* Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks adopts global treaty by consensus to regulate fishing on high seas.

* Subcommission on Minorities begins substantive work by considering violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide.

* WFP vacates some food warehouses in Rwanda to ease overcrowding in prisons and detention centres.

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The Croatian Army this morning launched a major offensive against the Krajina Serbs, shelling Knin and launching air raids near Gracac and south of Medak. Croatian troops also shelled United Nations observation posts, and a Danish peace-keeper was killed by deliberate tank fire in Sector North. Two Polish peace-keepers were injured in a separate incident. Meanwhile, the Krajina Serbs retaliated with attacks on Karlovac and Ogulin.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed deep regret at the reopening of large-scale conflict, saying lives would be needlessly lost as a result of the course of action

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adopted by President Franjo Tudjman and the Croatian Government. Stressing that war would not resolve the issues at stake, he called on the Government and the Serbs to halt hostilities and return to the negotiating table.

The Secretary-General condemned the targeting of United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO) positions, which had led to the death of the Danish soldier. Peace-keepers were taking no part in the conflict and should not be subjected to hostile fire by either side for any reason whatsoever, he said.

Last night, the Security Council demanded that the Croatian parties halt all military actions and exercise the utmost restraint. In a statement by its President, Nugroho Wisnumurti (Indonesia), the Council stressed that there could be no military solution to the conflict in Croatia. It called on the parties to commit themselves to the process of talks begun yesterday in Geneva and to accept the draft agreement drawn up by the Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia as a basis for continuing those talks.

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Special Representative Yasushi Akashi today expressed profound regret at the outbreak of hostilities in Croatia, which set back the prospects of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. He called on the parties to return to the negotiating table and pursue progress through peaceful dialogue, saying they should make every effort to avoid further bloodshed.

Mr. Akashi emphasized his concern for the civilians affected by the fighting and for the safety of United Nations personnel. He urged the responsible leaders to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure that the human rights of the affected population were observed.

The United Nations would continue to implement its mandate wherever possible, Mr. Akashi stressed. It would maintain an active presence and continue to report to the international community. The Organization would also address the humanitarian consequences of the fighting by supporting the work of humanitarian agencies.

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Acting without a vote, the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks today adopted a global Agreement to regulate fishing on the high seas. For the first time, States will be legally bound to conserve and sustainably manage high seas fisheries and settle fishing disputes peacefully.

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The Agreement, which is within the framework of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, will enter into force 30 days after its ratification by 30 signatories. That process is expected to take about two years, but in the meantime States can apply the Agreement provisionally.

Conference Chairman Satya Nandan (Fiji) described the Agreement as far-sighted, bold and revolutionary in addressing the problems facing straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. It called for action at the regional, national and global levels, and was firmly based on the Law of the Sea Convention. The Agreement reinforced and secured the future of the Convention by dealing with problems raised in its implementation.

The Agreement was built on three essential pillars, Mr. Nandan said. First, it set out principles for conservation and management based on the precautionary approach and the best scientific information. Second, it assured conservation measures were adhered to and not undermined by those who fished for migratory stocks. Third, the agreement included provisions for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

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The Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has begun its substantive work by considering violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in different parts of the world. It decided last year to begin its 1995 session with that item in an effort to streamline its work and give its 26 experts time to draft resolutions.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) said there had been violent religious persecution in Viet Nam and Sudan, episodes of genocide in Burundi, and racial discrimination, institutional discrimination and improper detention of illegal immigrants in the United States. They also cited human rights abuses in Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Nigeria, Turkey, Iraq, India, Myanmar and Pakistan.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has begun emptying several food warehouses in Rwanda, so that the Government can convert them into detention centres to ease prison overcrowding. Some 50,000 people are detained in 14 prisons and 196 detention centres which have an official capacity of only 11,500. Humanitarian organizations have described living conditions in the prisons and detention centres are squalid and unsanitary.

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